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The Reality of the Refugee Crisis in Italy: A Look into the Lives of Illegitimate Refugees and the Unofficial Organizations That Support Them

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The Reality of the Refugee Crisis in Italy: A Look into the Lives of Illegitimate Refugees and the Unofficial Organizations That Support Them

by

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Abstract

The words written on the United States of America's famous Statue of Liberty, written by poet Emma Lazarus over a century ago:

> *Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *your huddled masses yearning to breathe free*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. . . .*

America and Europe alike have forgotten the sacred words that gave hope to so many 100 years ago. Many use phrases like "floods of people" or "swarms" to describe those who leave their countries for a life in the Western world. Which of the refugees welcomed into the most powerful country in the world were considered "real" refugees? Were they refugees or just "migrants"? It did not matter, as there was no need for a distinction under the policies of unlimited immigration. A refugee was once described as "someone who has been compelled to abandon his home" (Zolberg et al. 1989). This could have included victims of natural disasters, war, and political or religious persecution.

Today, there is a narrower definition of what it means to be a refugee. As defined United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is a "person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" ("Figures at a Glance", 2017). This definition, the universally accepted definition of a refugee, is not satisfactory. It does not include victims of natural disaster, famine, or other events in which an individual cannot be held responsible for. For instance, on the UNHCR website there are 65.6 million displaced peoples who have been forced from their homes, while only 22.5 million are refugees known by the UNHCR, with only 189,300 resettled in 2016. What is difference between the 22.5 million and the other 43.1 million? The answer is simply a difference in labelling. 22.5 million are considered real, while the other 43.1 million are left behind.

Those who have obtained official refugee status receive privileges that those without it do not have access to, such as quick admission to other countries, legal protections, and even extra financial or tangible benefits from the public sector. The UN's definition of refugees is narrow, and many are denied official refugee status because they do not fall under it. This definition needs to be changed, and this paper will discuss both refugees recognized under UNHCR's definition and international law, the "legal refugees" compared to those who do not fit the definition, the "false" refugees. Under the UNHCR definition, 55% of the world's refugees come from South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria (2017). These are the highest levels of displaced peoples on record, and much higher off the record.

This research is an honest look into the European Refugee Crisis, examining how illegitimate refugees are disproportionately advantaged compared to those we deem *officially recognized* refugees, and how policies, public sentiment, and the very definition of refugee must be changed to more positively affect refugees. The following questions will be discussed: How is Italy, and the entirety of the European Union, handling the greatest refugee crisis of our time?

How can Italy prevail against these overwhelming odds? Why are only some refugees "legal" and much more considered "false"? Does the definition of a refugee need to be changed? How does the EU need to adapt to this crisis, and how can they assist Italy and other southern states further?

This research will focus on refugees' journeys both to the country of Italy and attempts to go throughout Europe. There is a marked difference between these two processes, and the research will briefly look at the "clean" resettlement process through the UNHCR, and then look at the reality of the refugee crisis for countries geographically closer to the source, specifically Italy and the rest of Europe. Then economic benefits of refugees will be presented, as well as the crisis in Italy of the "migration business". A large portion of this research project will be grounded in primary research, with secondary sources to supplement my first-hand experiences. Europe has left the Mediterranean states behind, abandoning them with heavy refugee flows and incredibly limited methods of assisting refugees. The southern states have the bulk of the burden, and the rest of the European Union must assist these countries or they *will* crumble.

Europe has had much difficulty in responding to the refugee crisis. The southern countries of the European Union have endured the most dramatic consequences, specifically Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Italy and Greece are the primary countries of first arrival for refugees coming to Europe by sea (Gattinara, 2017). Italy has been plagued by many other challenges in the last few years as well, from the Great Recession to the ending of their bipolar party system. Italy received about 75% of the continent's total refugees in 2016, about 160,000 of them (Tory-Murphy, 2017). To understand the European Union's stance on the matter, one must understand the "Dublin principle", established at the Dublin Convention of 1990 and then revamped in the Dublin II Regulation of 2003. The Dublin principle places legal responsibility on migrants and asylum applications of non-EU migrants of those who entered illegally to the first European country of entry. For this reason, many migrants and refugees have been stuck in Italy and Greece, as they are the first countries of entry for a vast majority of migrants and refugees. The Dublin principle needs to be revamped to aid these countries, who are disproportionally burdened by inflows of refugees and migrants, as well as to create more opportunities for refugees.

Gattinara's study focuses on both the regulatory dimension, honing in on how the crisis has been managed in Italy and the EU, and the dimension of public reaction to the crisis, looking at how public opinion on refugees and migration has changed in Italy since the crisis began. On the regulatory side, Gattinara focuses on the Dublin Principle and the ways it unjustly burdens Italy and Greece, with only 8,000 of 35,000 officially recognized refugees in Italy being relocated as of 2017. The European Union is failing the Mediterranean countries, leaving them behind and forcing them to carry the burden of responsibility, even though they are perhaps the most economically incapable states to do so. As for the public opinion surrounding refugees, Gattinara demonstrates that perhaps the reason the governments of the EU have not come to the rescue of the southern countries is due to the publics' anxieties and changes in perception toward refugees and the unfairly labelled "economic migrants". According to Gattinara's research, 40% of Italians believe immigration is one of the two most important problems facing Italy at this moment, whereas in 2014, only 5% of citizens considered immigration to be a pressing issue. According to the Pew Research Centre, in 2016, 60% of Italians believed that inflows of

refugees will increase domestic terrorism, much higher than the European median. In the same study, 70% of Italians expressed unfavorable views toward those of the Islamic faith.

The public sentiment toward refugees in Italy has led to the rise of heavy anti-immigration parties. There is *Lega Nord,* (The Northern League) ran by Matteo Salvini who has called for an ethnic cleansing in Italy, as well as Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* party, and even more liberal parties like *Cinque Stelle* (Five Star) have expressed heavy anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments. This is important not only for the lives of refugees, but also for European Unity as a whole. Currently, Europe is failing Italy and the other Mediterranean countries by their refusal to assist these countries in dealing with the refugee crisis, and in turn failing these human beings. Gattinara posits that the refugee crisis in Italy is a crisis of "legitimacy" (2017). Legitimate refugees have an easier time applying and being processed for resettlement or relocation, while those who are considered illegal have an incredibly difficult time, often being left in the dirt.

Economic Impact of Refugees

Literature studying the economic impact of refugees on society are plentiful, and the general consensus is that surges of refugees generally create a slight increase in growth of GDP (Aiyar et al, 2016). Naturally, an influx of migration to a country increases the supply of labor as more refugees enter the labor force, but in actuality, this impact is contingent upon how well refugees integrate into their new societies (2016). Migrants tend to have lower wages and higher unemployment rates than natives, but this is highly due to refugees often being forced to take under the table work or being entirely unable to work due to legal constraints on refugees and asylum seekers.

There are three policy factors that must be addressed in order for refugees in their new countries to reduce their unemployment rates and to create positive economic impacts for the host country. First, policies should be developed that enable refugees to work. In Italy, refugees are not allowed to do *anything*. They exist solely to eat and sleep. Additionally, well-developed policies would likely improve native sentiment toward refugees, as many typically think of them as freeloaders. However, the reality is that the government's current policies are force the hands of refugees, and require them to do nothing but live off the welfare system. They cannot improve their lives even if they wanted to. These policies need to include things like "removing restrictions on taking up work during the asylum application phase" (Aiyar et al, 2016).

The second necessity is to provide refugees with greater access to "geographical mobility". Refugees are often stuck in the housing they are initially provided, restricting their ability to move around based on demand for labor. An overwhelming majority of economists already agree that any negative effects of allowing migrants to flow freely in the labor market, like lower wages and higher unemployment are often solely in the short-term. These policies must be developed in order to allow refugees free access to labor markets. Specifically in Italy, refugees are unable to do anything when they arrive, and this is a problem. Many Italians think of the refugee crisis as a "swarm of Africans", but in reality there are more Italians leaving Italy every year than there are migrant arrivals. Undeniably, there is space to be filled in Italy, and

there is a sense of irony that Italians despise migrants while also being one of the top countries in which natives are leaving to chase better lives (Parati, 2017).

The third policy issue that needs solving is the ability to have "rapid labor market integration" (Aiyar et al, 2016). This is vital to lowering the government cost of migrant and refugee inflows. The quicker governments are able to get refugees working, the sooner they will begin contributing to the government through contributions such as income taxes and social security payments. Specifically in Italy, these policies will diminish the adverse effects of having a dramatically aging population. Most of the labor market in Italy is old, a result of low birth rates and long life expectancy, as well as the economic crisis severely affecting youth employment rates, leading to a mass diaspora from Italy (Manca, 2016).

Refugee Resettlement

The Refugee Resettlement process is exhaustive. According to the UNCHR's Refugee Resettlement Fact page, resettlement is defined as "the careful selection by governments – for purposes of lawful and secure admission – of the most vulnerable refugees who can neither return to their home country nor live in safety in their current host country." Resettlement is used as a means of protection for those whose lives and basic human liberties are under threat. Additionally, it can show developed countries support for the developing countries that are hosting most of the world's displaced peoples.

This is different than the process of relocation, which is exclusive to the European Union. Relocation refers to "the movement of refugees from one EU member state to another. It is an intra-EU process" (European Resettlement Network, 2017). These asylum seekers who are successfully processed are relocated from the southern countries like Greece and Italy to other countries in the European Union. Successful applicants are also granted refugee status in the country they relocate to. As of June 13, 2017, only 6,898 refugees have been relocated from Italy, and 13,973 from Greece (European Commission, 2017).

Though this research focuses primarily on Italy, I will be showcasing the resettlement process through the United States as well, in order to provide a greater understanding of the process within my own native country. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, the first step is to become considered a refugee, which starts by a person fleeing their homes ("How do Refugees Come to America?" 2017). Most items are left behind, including any documentation or identification. Then, they need to seek legal refugee status from UNHCR, which then offers "refugee protections, assistance, and alternative legal and travel documents." Refugees cannot apply for resettlement themselves, meaning that the United Nations likely misses many potential cases for resettlement. Additionally, "the number of refugees resettled worldwide dropped by over 50% in 2017 vs. 2016" (UNHCR, 2018). This is likely due to increasing anti-immigrant sentiment, and the entire world is currently failing refugees more than ever before. Only about 1% of all refugees are referred for resettlement by UNHCR, even though their own estimates predict that up to 8% of the refugee population is in need of resettlement (2018).

In the United States, any refugee approved for resettlement is sent to the Refugee Data Center in New York, which then places the refugee with one of the eleven agencies tasked with resettling refugees around the United States (2017). All refugees must then receive medical and

security clearances for admission into the U.S., along with a cultural orientation prior to arrival. The government then arranges air travel for the refugees, but the refugees have must repay the government for travel costs. The resettlement organizations work hard to help provide housing, documentation, food, English classes, and medical evaluations when the refugees arrive. The refugees only have 90 days of assistance by a refugee organization, after which they are expected to be self-sufficient. Under the Trump Administration, refugee resettlement numbers have dwindled dramatically. Local resettlement agencies across the nation have begun campaigns asking the federal government, "Where are our families?" as President Trump is currently not on track to resettle the 45,000 refugees the administration to which the administration committed.

On the contrary, Italy does not have an official refugee resettlement program. They made an ad-hoc agreement with UNHCR to resettle refugees from Iraq, according to the European Resettlement Network ("Italy", 2017). Through the ad-hoc program, Italy has resettled 174 people, mostly from Palestine. However, "real" refugees can be granted a permit to stay for three years with rights to work, health assistance, family reunion, social assistance, travel documents, and have an assignment of public housing. It is important to understand that Italy is considered a transitory country for refugees, meaning that refugees go there with the goal of relocation to another country.

Migration as a Business

The most recent challenge Italy has been faced with was when the route from Turkey to Greece closed in 2016, majorly pushing the inflows of migrants and refugees toward Libya and Italy instead. The bulk of the problems with the EU's policies toward refugee resettlement and asylum seekers arise from Dublin regulation. Refugees must claim asylum in the first country of arrival, which discussed earlier is Italy for 75% of all refugees. The refugee assistance systems in Europe are incredibly broken, with anti-immigrant sentiments and ultra-conservative leaders making heavy gains all over the continent. Borders are closing, relocation for refugees is getting harder, and they are now stuck. Stuck in Italy. Unable- yet desiring- to work, unable to live independently, and unable to be guaranteed access to the basic needs humans have. Many refugees in Italy are "funneled into the official reception system – a diffuse collection of apartments, former hotels, church dormitories and even a former United States army base – meant to house and integrate asylum seekers as they go through their legal proceedings" (Tory-Murphy, 2017). These systems in Italy are privately run and partially funded by the European Commission through two separate funds providing Italy with $90.37 million to support these centers. The total cost for the primary reception system in 2016 was about $2.95 billion dollars. This is *a lot* of money to be handled by private cooperatives that operate on for-profit models. This deeply flawed system has created a sort of "migration business" operating model in many parts of Italy. Many migrants are hired for work by farmers, and harvest mostly oranges and tomatoes. They are treated horrendously, and "their wages are part of the illicit economy that makes up around 20% of Italy's overall GDP" (Nadeau, 2018).

There have been all too many corruption scandals throughout Italy in these types of organizations, from the arrest of a man having claimed to have made $59 million from the operation, an embezzlement scandal in Calabria in which $42.5 million was siphoned off of public funds (Tory-Murphy, 2017). In the article, an educator and creator of a small reception center for minors said that the corruption should not be surprising because "the mafia and corruption are present in all kinds of institutions". The claim that the Italian mafia is raking in

cash from migration business is not uncommon amongst Italians. Many Italians I know personally believe that the mafia controls the business of migration. According to the Guardian, the mafia considers migration business more profitable than the drug trade. The criminal group infiltrated asylum centers across Italy, siphoning off millions of euros by "buying and selling the names and details of migrants who had long disappeared, in order to keep the per-person state funding coming" (Nadeau, 2018).

According to the Economist, Italy has thousands of refugees pouring in from Libya across the Mediterranean ("Italy is facing a surge", 2017). They now surpass Greece for the most refugees landing in their country this year. Italy also has an increasing amount of "illegal refugees," or people that have not legally obtained refugee status. Many of these people must stay in unofficial refugee camps with assistance from unpaid volunteers. The federal government does almost nothing to help these illegitimate refugees, with unofficial organizations picking up the slack, as legal organizations usually cannot help unofficial refugees. These unofficial organizations are also putting their own livelihoods at risk to help. They are often, harassed, arrested, or beaten by the Italian police because of their assistance to refugees.

However, there are many examples of faltering Italian villages who suffer from depopulation that have opened their doors to refugees. These villages are now flourishing again thanks to these refugees, who are also thriving in their new environments by opening up businesses, increasing demand for goods, filling homes, and paying taxes. According to Time Magazine, one of these is the small Sicilian village of Sutera, with many of empty homes and work available as well (Tondo, 2016). If this idea could be implemented on a broader scale, the Italian refugee crisis could have some slack cut off itself. Another example of this being a possible durable solution is that of the small village Mineo. This town was vehemently against the opening of a refugee camp in the area, and were very angry when it opened. However, once the camp was scheduled for closing, the same townspeople protested against closing the camp, as the economic benefits from the camp and the increased population were so tremendous.

This study began in May 2017 during an unpaid internship with a local refugee resettlement agency, Canopy Northwest Arkansas. I worked as their Community Outreach Intern over the summer and continued as their Digital Communications Intern through December 2017. I grew to be passionate about displaced people groups and chose to focus my studies and research on what I consider to be the greatest humanitarian crisis since the Holocaust. During July, the institutional review board (IRB) approved my request for travel to Rome to conduct more hands-on research at a refugee camp in the city. The organization running the informal camp was Baobab Experience; a grassroots group composed of entirely volunteers who devote time out of their day to helping refugees.

Baobab Experience

To begin, my time at Baobab will be described in first person, to develop an idea of the camp. The details are based on handwritten notes that I took at the end of each day in Rome. These notes will outline many aspects of Italian culture and how they view refugees, as well as aspects of the camp and how Baobab functioned as an organization. Then, four stories taken via audio interviews will be shared. I aim to give a voice to those who are considered "false" or "illegitimate" refugees, to share their journeys and the perils they went through to finally arrive at the alleged promise of European safety. I will also highlight an interview with the director of the Baobab Experience, Andrea Costa, about the beginnings of the organization and the plan for

Baobab going forward. Additionally, I recorded a meeting between Baobab volunteers and refugees that showcases how the organization communicates with, views, and treats refugees.

Baobab Journal Notes

On my first day with Baobab in Rome, I had many expectations of what the reality of the camp would be like. I expected to show up to a building with decent facilities and rooms for the refugees to sleep in. After wandering around the Tiburtina train station on the east side of Rome for almost two hours, trying to find the pin sent to me from the Baobab Facebook group, I finally stumbled upon the camp. It was right there the whole time, but was nothing like I had expected it to be. The camp was nothing but scattered tents in a sprawling, unused parking lot with an abandoned building on the east side of the lot. A malnourished refugee from the Gambia kindly greeted me, eventually escorting me into the camp. We entered through a broken fence to the west side of the camp. Upon entry, I realized just how poor the conditions of the camp were. Mattresses were strewn across the lot with a couple of camp chairs, and many people just sitting on the ground acting like they were waiting on something. The camped smelled quite putrid almost like human waste. Looking across the camp, I realized there were absolutely no facilities. The building next to the lot was walled off and abandoned, with no way for the refugees to enter. The man from the Gambia guided me around different areas of the camp. He showed me the realities of the refugee crisis as well as how different people groups tended to remain separate from others, like the Kurds and Eritreans for example.

After a while, wondering where other volunteers were, I realized I was the only non-refugee in the camp. Around 12:30, I saw cars of Italian people begin unloading pasta and pizza to give to the refugees. I helped unload and set up the lunch area, where the refugees quickly gathered to get in line. I met a volunteer named Alessandra, who began explaining to me the inner workings of this camp and Baobab as an organization. These were the refugees that either could not prove they were refugees, didn't have their documents, or weren't officially recognized as refugees under Italian law. This meant that they receive the lowest form of treatment of all refugees. She explained to me that many refugees with documents can get into Catholic or Red Cross facilities, but that those facilities don't help the "illegal" refugees. Alessandra then told me that the government does not allow Baobab to truly exist, and for that reason, they must operate solely through Facebook. Essentially, Baobab functions as a nonprofit organization without the ability to be legally recognized as one, or receives the benefits that nonprofits do. She told me that there are various different private Facebook groups that Baobab uses, so that the Italian government and police cannot monitor or intercept Baobab's organizational plans.

Alessandra then threw more facts at me, like how they average 30 kilograms of pasta per meal, all donated and cooked fresh by volunteers, or how fights can break out when there is not enough food. I spoke to various refugees, who overwhelmingly told me that access to water is a much bigger issue than access to food. There is no running water near the camp, so refugees take turns wheeling a grocery cart with empty water jugs to a hose half a mile away, near Tiburtina station. I also learned that they are only able to access showers once a week at a nearby gym. On that first day, as well as most other days, there was so much extra pasta that most of the volunteers were able to get a plate for themselves.

I counted the refugees at the camp estimated that there were about 100 people there. The top countries refugees were from were Eritrea and Sudan, with Somalia next and then some from Ethiopia, Cameroon, the Gambia, Nigeria, Chad, and Guinea. Alessandra further told me that

any improvements volunteers have tried to make for the camp are quickly destroyed or removed by the Roman police. She said, “anything that actually works and benefits the poor in Rome gets torn down.” She told me of one time in which the volunteers placed trashcans around the camp to reduce litter and tidy up the camp a little bit, but the police raided the camp and removed the trashcans. The Italian police even went so far as to install a blockade at the camp to prevent emergency vehicles from being able to drive into the camp, and blocked off an abandoned, sheltered area the migrants would sleep under when it rains. She said the government would rather hide the refugee problem from the city so the Roman Italians can pretend the problem does not exist. Another volunteer told me that Baobab goes above and beyond other refugee organizations, because they do not turn away assistance from anybody because they aren’t “cute or pretty enough”. One volunteer even said that the Italian government has given into “Trumpism”, a style of fearmongering spearheaded by the United States president. From my first day at the camp, I realized how much different the refugee problem is in Italy than what my expectations had been.

I spent much time with Baobab over a two-week period, and learned much more about the organization after that first day. I noticed that refugees would rather not eat than have to eat food they do not enjoy; something I did not expect from people whom I imagined would be hungry regularly. The volunteers also aim to provide refugees with as much choice as possible, as they view choice as one of the core things that make us human. Over my time volunteering, I noticed that the refugees loved to help with lunch and dinner as well. They helped set-up, unload the food and beverages from the car, and clean up. Furthermore, I noticed that a heavy majority of the refugees here were younger men from ages 18-35. Though my count changed every day, the camp was typically composed of about 90% males and 10% females, with very few outside of the 18-35 age range. Any arrivals who were younger than 18 were instantly filed for placement in official refugee facilities. I only saw one infant there, on my second day volunteering, but he was transferred to Red Cross by the time I showed up the next day, along with his mother. Almost every refugee I spoke to had fled their native countries to Libya, and they had paid a smuggler for transport from Libya to Italy. Many migrants and refugees had tried to go to other countries in Europe from Italy, but were stopped at the border every time and forced to return to Italy.

On the shower days, the first things refugees did was find an outlet to plug in their phones. This concerned them more than the queue for the showers, as their phones are their only connection to family and friends back home, as well as those they separated from throughout their journeys. The showers lasted from 2:00 to about 6:30 with about 20 volunteers rotating positions, but present the entire time. During the showers, volunteers gave out new articles of clothing to the refugees, ranging from shoes to pants to nice shirts. The migrants were then offered three choices of every clothing type. If they did not like them, they could go without any new clothes. This furthered the volunteers’ idea of choice being an important factor for refugees to retain their humanity. At the showers, I again counted the number of refugees present, resulting in a total of 120 men and six women. This absolutely boggled my mind. The notion that women and children refugees were moved to nicer facilities held true, especially after realizing later on when all six of the women from the showers were transferred to official facilities the following day. One thing Baobab did that stood out to me was their utilization of the more educated refugees as translators. Those who spoke multiple languages were paid by Baobab for

their time spent translating, creating attractive incentives for refugees to become part of the process of aiding refugees.

During the two weeks I spent in Rome, I learned many more details of how Baobab functions as an organization, through both refugees and volunteers. One such refugee was Jackson, who was from Cameroon. I squeezed in an interview just before he would be getting on a bus to Como in hopes of getting to Germany. He had tried once before, but was stopped at the border. This time around, he had received documents from Baobab's legal team. I discovered that twice a week, Baobab sends volunteer lawyers into the camp to try to help refugees file for documents that give them official refugee status. If these documents are processed and obtained, they are more able to freely to move around Europe. That same day, some police cars pulled up near the camp, and I noticed both the volunteers and the refugees begin to feel uneasy. The refugees either hid in their tents, or ran into the woods, along with the volunteers. I felt as though I had no choice but to also run, as I had heard stories of volunteers getting harassed and/or arrested. The police cars pulled away and then everything calmed down again. Then, a volunteer, Francesca, told me how the police sometimes come once a week and raid the camp. They often destroy tents, arrest volunteers, or take migrants down to the police station.

There is an extremely severe issue with racism in Rome. From the police treatment of migrants to the hateful looks I received while walking with refugees, racism is a tangible part of Italian society. Even at the Tiburtina train station, there were taxi drivers holding "Whites Only" signs to signify they do not want to transport migrants. I was even told of busses that segregate white and black people by putting them on different floors. Luckily, Baobab hosts many fun opportunities for the refugees to get their poor circumstances off their mind and help them feel human, like taking them to the beach every week or hosting basketball tournaments for them to participate in. I got to go to both a day at the beach as well as a basketball tournament. Migrants are offered the choice of participating, and it is free for them as Baobab uses their limited funding to provide these activities. The refugees loved these events, as they provided them relief from the realities of their situation. These are young men, most in their early twenties, who have forgotten what it is like to play games and have the freedom to have fun. Many refugees did smoke marijuana on an almost daily basis. I asked one from Sudan why, and he told me, "I smoke to forget where I am and what I've seen." Everyone around him agreed with him, and I realized this was likely the case for many of the migrants who do smoke.

July 31st, one of my last days working with Baobab, was the most active day at the camp I had seen yet. After lunch, I took a nap on some cardboard with some refugees I had met through the camp. We shared stories, laughed, and played soccer. I woke up around dinnertime, and noticed that a medical van was at the camp. It was a nonprofit called MEDU, or "Medici per i diritti umani", which translates to Doctors for Human Rights. I spoke with them and learned that they are there almost every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to provide medical checkups to refugees. They give them any prescriptions they need and make sure they are healthy. In addition, they have been involved with the primary reception system since 2014. Other than medical help, they work to identify victims of torture and provide emotional support to those they identify. MEDU is present for about four hours a day, and try to meet with every refugee who wants medical exams at least once a week.

Then, the Catholic Charities arrived, and I met Father Conrad, who advises the Pope on all matters regarding Catholic charitable activities. I was told it was the first time they came to

Baobab since Baobab was evicted from their previous location in San Lorenzo last year. They brought gift bags full of lotions, soaps, and other hygiene products, but ran out before they could give one to every refugee. However, they did bring an abundance of bananas and orange juice. Father Conrad had 20 volunteers with him, but not one of the volunteers even tried to interact with the refugees other than giving them their gift bags. In my eyes, it seemed like they were more interesting in fulfilling their "duty", checking it off the list, rather than actually trying to help these people. They had no interest in getting to know refugees or their stories. However, I followed up with some volunteers via Facebook in October, and heard that Catholic Charities have been coming to Baobab every week since then. The legal team was also at the camp on the same night, helping refugees understand the different legal options they have, while also retrieving basic information about them so they can try to assist in obtaining temporary legal documents for those who lost theirs.

Interviews

There are so many different stories from the refugees at Baobab, though only four were recorded and able to be transcribed for this research project. The whole interviews will be copied, with summaries, thoughts, and analysis written afterward.

Rec 012: Eddie from Senegal (16:22)

The first interview conducted was with Eddie, from Senegal. Eddie is 23 and was born in Guinea-Bissau. His story is a tragedy, but he is a fighter and a beautiful human being. He shared his hopes and his resilience with me in a way that I'd never seen before. He is also one of the refugees who helps Baobab out. He controls the crowds, translates, helps set up, and makes sure to guide the other refugees so they know what to do or where to go. Here is the interview with Eddie of Senegal and Guinea-Bissau:

Tell me your story from when you left Senegal to when you got from Italy.

Left Senegal to come here at the end of 2011 to 2012 because I am not a citizen of Senegal. I am a citizen of Guinea-Bissau. I was born in Guinea-Bissau. There is problems there a war- that war, I lose my family there so I don't have any family. And from there, there was one woman who take care of me in Senegal. I was young with that woman. That woman protect me.

How did you meet her?

I don't know how, I was so young. She just see me. All the people in Guinea-Bissau, they run, nobody don't care about anyone so everyone is saving their own life. So from there that woman she take care of me from Guinea-Bissau to Senegal. She took me to Senegal with her. I am 23 now, I don't know how old I was when I left Guinea-Bissau, maybe 5 or 6. I was small. I save myself in Senegal with that woman. She was a business woman. After I come with her she took me to her home. Me I call her mother because I don't know my mother. So she is my family. I don't know anyone, only her. So from there I started to go to school but no money. She took me to school but I had no money so I came back to her. I started to work small, as a fisherman. That man, I called that man my uncle because he was the brother of that woman. I start to work with him. After he died,

she was old now so I left Senegal. So I left to look for some work. I left Senegal at the end of 2011. We took a wooden boat from the island, then took a car. In Senegal, there is a town we call it Calequisse. I was working there, small, I followed the builders-buildings. I did some building and I followed them. They paid me small, small money. That money I feed myself with. I lived there then I worked in Mali small small. Then I come to Niger, I pass from there to come to Libya. Then when I come to Libya, it's empty, but Libya have the work. Problem is only war. Another war. There are fighting there. If anyone stayed there maybe they can tell you. Then after, I try to work in Libya and I'm working working working. Then I have too much money that day and I was very happy and I meet with four people in the road who have a gun and two have a knife. And not only me because some people are behind me. My friend come, and I go, I ask them because I was afraid because they have army. I ask them "What is the problem?" They say "you have money", I say no. They say if you don't give money to us we will kill you or wound you seriously. I say no money. They cut me. They follow more than 15 peoples and catch all of us inside one room. Now they start to rob us one by one. They took everything I have, my phone, my wallet. All of these scars here are from Libya. From that knife. Because we tried to fight with them. We break the room, and from there we run. From there they start to follow us. We see a man, he is an old Libyan man. He call us. He say you people must leave here. If it's not those people it will be us who kills you. They are just like oh it's a black man it's no different than killing a dog. So we leave from there and we go to one place, and found more people there with no food or money. We don't know what we are going to do so we get on a boat from 2 Libyan men. From the time we get to Libya to International the River. There is a river there they call it the international. They leave us there and go back. They took us inside the river and we don't see nothing and the Italians came to rescue us. They bring us here to Italy to Sicilia. In 2014. I have been in Italy for 3 years and 4 months now. I have been at Baobab for 3 months. I got there on the first of May 2017.

What do you think about Italy? The people?

Not all maybe 50% like immigrant and the other 50% don't. So it's 50-50.

Have you encountered racism here?

Of course it's here. Some people don't but some people do. When they see black they don't like it. It's not easy you know. Some people like immigrants but many don't like black.

Have you tried to leave Italy since you've been here?

No, no because I see many- if you try to go to another country they will send you around until you can find documents. The first country you enter is where you get documents and fingerprints. If you go somewhere else they will send you back to the country you started. So if it was Italy like me, then I can't leave. But if I find any work here I will work. I am trying to get documents.

How do you try to get your documents?

That was another thing. Because I don't know anybody here. So only God can help me with documents. Because some people help here but some people don't have anybody. It's luck. Im praying to God I get documents.

How do you think the volunteers at Baobab are?

The volunteers here are very good. I help them. They trust me and I trust them so I help them. I am a refugee from one country to another. And these people at Baobab they help us here so much. Without them I would have no place to stay, no food. So thank God for these people, they try. At Baobab they try. They are good people and they try.

Are you trying to learn Italian?

Yes, I am getting better and I went to class before but now too much thinking I don't go. That woman taught me English and took me to school. Learn small but good.

If you got your documents would you be interested in going to university?

Here? I don't think so because it's expensive and time is not there. If you want to learn with these people you have to pay more money. It's not easy. There is an immigrant office here and they give me an appointment. So I will go there to get fingerprint and documents and asylum. My appointment is in September. I have only one fingerprint, the one from when I entered here.

Top three countries:

If I got my documents, I like many countries even Italy I like it. If I think now, it's just disappointing. I still don't have documents and still am in Italy, so I don't want to get disappointed. I like Italy but it could be better. I don't know what will happen tomorrow.

Eddie was born in the war-torn Guinea-Bissau, lost his family, and was taken in by a Good Samaritan who raised him and made him the man he is today. She took him from his homeland to Senegal to save him, and raised him in a decent home. He went to school for a while, but could not afford it and went back to the woman. She was all he had, and her brother employed him as a fisherman. After a while, his caretaker was too old and her brother died. He left to look for work. He continued his journey, working along the way to get money for the journey. However, everywhere he went in Africa was not safe, struck by war. Eventually, as a majority of refugees do, Eddie found himself in Libya, working.

Then one day, he was mugged. A gang, with guns and knives, attacked him and his friends. He showed me his scars. They were all over his body, a true sign of torture and of distress. They took everything he owned, and another man told Eddie and his friends that they must leave. Black men are not welcome in Libya, and the man compared killing them to killing a dog. They were forced to flee by boat, and were eventually rescued by the Italians came to rescue them. That was in 2014. Eddie has been in Italy for almost 4 years now, though only spent three months at Baobab.

Unlike the general migrant consensus, Eddie likes Italy. He acknowledges that there are many good Italians who recognize his humanity and his condition, even if the other half is abhorrently racist. He wants to work, and retrieve documents for legal residency and work. Eddie, like many migrants I spoke to, does not enjoy or want to be a freeloader. He wants the ability to provide for himself and contribute to society. He enjoys Baobab greatly, and has created a bond of mutual trust with the volunteers as well as refugees. He is also quite good at Italian, as he attended language class for a few months, alongside trying his best to use Italian when speaking with volunteers. His appointment for asylum documents was in September.

I reached out to Eddie in March via Facebook messenger, and he told me that the government moved his appointment for asylum to May, meaning he may finally get asylum status as he dreamed. He was also finally transferred to an official facility this year, almost five months ago. He is now staying at the Red Cross, and is eagerly waiting his appointment date. However, Eddie still visits Baobab everyday to see his friends, volunteers at the camp, and continues building relationships with the Italian volunteers. It is remarkable to me that Eddie, even after transfer to a more-secure facility, still appreciates what Baobab has done for him that he is willing to volunteer his time to give back.

Many could consider Eddie an "economic refugee", one who leaves their home "in search of better job prospects and higher living standards. Economic refugees see little opportunity in their own countries to escape poverty and are willing to start over in a new country, for a chance at a better life (Investopedia, 2018). This could not be further from the truth. Eddie did not truly have a home, or a feeling of belonging to a country. He was swept out of his country at a young age, effectively becoming a refugee the moment his family was murdered. He may have found peace for a while, but without the ability to receive a proper education and the loss of his symbolically adopted family, he had nothing. He had to leave to find a better life. For him, this was not even an option. Eddie is one of the refugees that the UNHCR and Italy's government considers to be *false*. Illegitimate. A fraud. What this labeling of migrants tends to neglect is the reality of these human situations. Eddie went through many trials and tribulations on his journey toward security and safety, and fleeing violence and racism, which is exactly the definition of a refugee.

Rec 013: Ahmed Ali from Sudan/Eritrea (13:53)

The next interview was done with Ahmed, a refugee from Eritrea. Ahmed is one of the kindest and gentlest men I have had the pleasure to know. He worked for Baobab as a translator starting the first day he arrived at the camp, which was during my stay. I had the privilege of being one of the first people he met at the camp, and grew close with him over my short time there. He focused all of his energy on helping other refugees have an easier time successfully living under tough conditions. Our interview was rather short, as my voice recorder was close to dying during it. For that reason, I did less question asking and more listening. Here it is:

Ahmed, I would love to hear your story.

My name is Ahmed Ali. I'm from Sudan. Yeah I'm from Eritrea but I was born in Sudan. So I'm both. I speak Arabic and Eritrean. I know six languages. I am 26 years old. I left Sudan 4 months ago. It was dangerous for me to stay there. Because for refugees it's very difficult. I have two nationalities so it is even more difficult. I was not staying in a refugee camp, I was staying with a friend. I left

four months ago but I stayed there for 2 or 3 years. I left Eritrea due to the danger, the governments, and human rights violations. Political violence and religious violence as well but for me political violence. I was in university. I know from my family and brother that the military is dangerous. My brother was in the military, and I was a student. Everyone has 6 months of military training there. I left Eritrea in 2010. I went back to Sudan, left and went to Ethiopia and then came back to Sudan. I left Sudan on the 4th of March in 2017. I have two skills, one is barber and one is tailor. I still had to leave because it was dangerous. I was scared because I saw a lot of my friends and they were taking them. I fled alone but I met people. I got smuggled out of Sudan in a small van with 11 people in it. Then it was 18 and we crossed the desert. It was very hard. Then we went up to the coast of Libya. They put us in a place- a secure place. If you don't pay they'll punish you or beat you or not give you food. I spent all of my money getting here. Took a boat from Libya to Italy. It was about 6 hours until we met the rescue ship. There were 600 people on my boat. Very dangerous, and many people fell out or jumped to swim toward the ship. They rescued all 600 of us though. They were an organization but not the government. I was in Sicily (landed June 28th) for one week. I got fingerprints and photos and they transferred us to a place far from city. No internet or communication. We stayed two days in the rescue ship before getting to Sicily. We came to Rome from there. I have an appointment for relocation to get my documents. The date of the appointment is on November 7th. I may be trying to go to Ventimiglia or Como though. The Baobab staff is very good people who help us. I would like to thank them because they do all of this for us. It's very hot here though. But not as hot as Sudan. Here, somehow I get enough food and water.

Have you experienced any difficulties with Italian police?

Here? No. But Ive only been here for two weeks. I will wait until my appointment to decide what to do with relocation. With relocation we do not choose where we go. If I could go anywhere I could I would try to go to Milan or England. The government doesn't care about anyone but we are a community here and we get along. I haven't experienced any racism here, I know others have though.

Ahmed originally told me he was Eritrean, though like Eddie he was also born in a different country: Sudan. He is a polyglot, with the impressive ability to speak 6 languages including Arabic, Eritrean, English, Italy and two local languages to Sudan. Though he never stayed in a refugee camp, he still endured much strife on his journey. He left Eritrea due to threats of political violence and fear of Eritrean human rights violations. As a man with two nationalities, Ahmed never truly felt like he belonged to either, knowing that both of his home countries were incredibly dangerous places.

Ahmed went back to the country of his birth, Sudan, in 2010 to find safety. Luckily, he had professional skills, working both as a tailor and a barber. This kept his life comfortable for a time, but he once again was thrust into danger. Friends were being taken, and he had to flee for his life alone. He crossed the desert with 18 others, arriving in Libya, only to be placed on a boat with 600 others to sail the Mediterranean and land on European soil. His journey was perilous,

and he thought many would die on the journey. However, nobody did and an Italian rescue organization saved all 600 of the refugees.

Like Eddie, Ahmed had an appointment for asylum on November 7th, though he was hoping to get to another country before then. Our interview was conducted on July 31st, meaning he would have had to wait at the camp for another 100 days. I have not been able to contact Ahmed since my time in Rome, so there is no way to know where he is or if he was successful. However, this man had some valuable trade skills. This man could have easily gained employment at either a barbershop or working as a tailor, but without the ability to work legally, he was forced to live a stagnant life in a refugee camp. Ahmed is a prime example of how a refugee could positively benefit the Italian economy, but due to faulty government policy, is without the ability to.

Rec 006: Ibrahima from The Gambia (21:07)

From the Gambia, Ibrahima, or Abraham, was the refugee I got closer to than any other. He was the first person I met at the camp, and he is still there today. He was and still the most popular refugee at the Baobab, as he develops relationships with everyone he meets. His personality is radiant and absorbing, and his laugh makes everyone around him happy. He is very small, and if one saw him they would guess he was in his late teens or early 20s. Shockingly though, Abraham is almost 33. According to his own words, unlike other refugees in the camp, Abraham is an economic refugee. However, many volunteers are skeptical of his story, as he had exuded many signs of torture and psychological trauma. The people at Doctors for Human Rights thought he may have blocked off many aspects of his journey to European safety, and his reasoning for leaving the Gambia. His English abilities are not great by any means, and it was often difficult to understand what he was saying or decipher points he wants to get across. My interview with him did not reveal anything that the volunteers and those at MEDU suspected, and since nothing was confirmed, I chose to take Abraham at his word. Here is my interview with him:

Okay. I'm here with my friend Ninki Nanka, the crocodile, otherwise known as Ibrahima from the Gambia, and he is going to talk about his journey to Rome, where he has been for 2 months. So why did you leave Gambia?

I leave Gambia in 2007 to go to another country because there was no future for me there. I didn't have any problems there.

What was your life like there?

I just wanted to leave to see the world, I love travelling and wanted a better future.

What was your life like in Gambia?

My life was okay in Gambia. I did farming and business. I farmed grains and rice with my family. We had 9 in number. 2 parents and 7 kids. All of them are still in Gambia except one, who is in Germany. I don't know why he left. We don't talk.

So how did you leave Gambia?

I left Gambia to Senegal, Niger, Burkina-Faso, Libya all by car and then to Italy. I came by smugglers from Gambia to Libya, and it was a really hard journey. I try to stay in contact with my family. I paid a smuggler 900 euro to get from Libya to Italy. The first boat ride we didn't make it, so I had to return to Libya and then try again. The smuggler was not good. But at least nobody died. I landed in Marina Siracusa in Sicily. I stayed there for a few hours and then went to Priolo Gargallo. Then I went to Caltanissetta, where I got documents and papers. They transfer me to San Cataldo, outside of Caltanissetta, and then to Catania.

Is that where you worked and farmed the *melanzane* (apples)?

No that was in Puglia. I was only in Italy for six months then, and then moved to Sweden, where I studied Swedish. I decided to go there, and I liked it more than Italy.

Do you like Rome?

Yeah I like Rome. I'm currently getting help to write my CV from some of the volunteers. I can't get work with it without another document. I will go tomorrow and ask about it.

How do you get your documents?

Somebody from Baobab will take me there I think. I would like to have any work. I don't care what. I have been in Europe for almost three years with very little work.

Are you glad you left Gambia or do you regret it?

Sometimes I think I will go back to Africa. I'm tired of Europe. I wish I never came. Some people treat me well and some treat me horribly. Everywhere there are good and bad people though.

So you didn't leave for any fear of violence like political or religious violence?

The fact is that many young people in Gambia do not have a future. We all think that if we leave Gambia we will get a future. We see our elders work their wholes lives and not get anything, and have no future. So a lot of young people realize that you cannot live a comfortable life in Gambia. Life in Europe for Africans is a catastrophe right now. It is very hard. The life is very bad.

Is life harder here than it was in Gambia?

Yeah I think many people have better lives in Africa than in Europe. Because we did not live like this in Africa. We had homes, water, food, family. So not like here. I have papers but I'm still stuck sleeping here outside because I can't work. I want to have a normal life and work and contribute to society. I'm still looking.
When you lived in Sweden did you have a home?

Yeah I had a home there and in Catania. But in Catania it was only a 6 month contract. I was in Sweden since 2014 until recently. I spent 3 years there, but

didn't have work. However, I did get housing. I still left because I couldn't get work. I decided to come back to Rome to try to get papers to try to go to Malta.

What do you think about Baobab?

At Baobab, they are trying. They can do better, more than this. To help us get a place and help more to get papers. I think they are doing all they can but the government is not letting them do more. The government is not good at all. They make money from the migrants but they don't help migrants. Migrants increase the Italian economy go up because for many years Italians have been leaving; they don't have any work either. Before the migrants, the Italians didn't have as much work but they get more work from us now. But they don't respect us.

Do you think Baobab does what they can with the resources they have?

Yeah Baobab doesn't make any money. It's all volunteer. They are just citizens. Yet, everyday, they help us with food, clothes, documents, medical, and help the women and children get to centers. Sometimes one boy Filippo even lets me sleep at his home. I always sleep outside and let others take the tents though. If rain comes I still sleep outside and let the rain hit me. Life in Italy is stressful. The hardest thing is that everybody here doesn't have anything. It's sad to me to see others like this even though I am like it too.

Have the police ever bothered you?

Yeah they have asked for my documents. They looked at them and then took me to the station. They took away my papers, my Permesso di Soggiorno. And now I have no documents.

Thank you for your time, Ibrahim.

Assuming that Abraham was truthful in his responses, Abraham left the Gambia 11 years ago as he decided there was no future for him there anymore. He did not have a destination in mind; he just desired to find a life that gave him a better future. He wanted to see the world and travel around. He did not mind his life in the Gambia, as he worked on his family farm. Though he may not have left due to threats of danger, his trip was assuredly perilous. He, like Eddie, has scars on his body, an obvious sign of torture. Though this could have occurred either in the Gambia or along the journey to Rome, the reality is clear that something bad happened. His journey through Africa, like both Eddie and Ahmed, was long and tough, with the eventual arrival to Libya. His first boat malfunctioned and returned to Libya, while his second smuggler ships' attempt landed him on the shores of Europe.

Abraham received temporary documents and was fingerprinted in Sicily. Travelling from Sicily to Puglia, Abraham eventually found some work farming apples. At another time outside the interview, he told me he was treated awfully and paid close to nothing. It was under-the-table work, and a real example of the Italian "migration business". He told me many other refugees and migrants also found work at farms like this, but that it was essentially slave labor. Six months into it, Abraham quit and moved to Sweden.

Abraham loved Sweden. He was the only refugee I spoke to who had successfully made it past Italy and into another country. He loved the Swedish, and had a comfortable living situation there. However, like Italy, he was not able to work. Though he spent three years in Sweden, Abraham wanted to work. He did not want to live off the welfare system forever, and returned to Italy in an attempt to go to Malta. Sadly, the Italian police took away Abraham's permesso di soggiorno, his permit to live in Italy, as well as documents confirming his identity. He was working on retrieving new ones at the time of our interview, but this has made pushed his dream of Malta even further down the road. Malta has a large amount of refugees compared to other countries, ranking tenth when measuring refugees per capita. Malta is home to about 14 migrants per 1,000 inhabitants (UNHCR, 2017). This makes it an attractive destination for migrants, and communities of migrants are integrating quite well with the culture there.

Abraham has unfortunately not been able to make it to Malta yet. He is in Rome, working on his resume to find work and attain asylum or relocation. As the unofficial "face" of Baobab, Abraham is frequently seen on their Facebook pages and helping at volunteer events. However, I have been unable to contact him and do not know his status of employment or residency. Though he regrets leaving the Gambia, and is sick of Europe and the copious racism he has encountered, Abraham is ever hopeful. His life in Africa was much better than his life in Italy, as he had a home, a family, and consistent access to food and water. He has none of that in Italy, though he clearly considers the community of Baobab his new family. This specific case shows how many refugees and migrants feel. Their homes are far away. They used to have shelter and family, and though they may have been poor, they all had lives and attachments in their native land. Abraham regrets leaving, and considers life in Europe for Africans a "catastrophe".

Rec 005: Kendo from Cameroon (21:40)

The final interview recorded and transcribed was taken with Kendo from Cameroon. Kendo had tried multiple times to cross the border of Lake Como and Switzerland, but was always caught and sent back. Kendo loves music. Every time I encountered him, he was either listening to R Kelly or old gospel music. He is adamant in his faith of God, but also very angry with the world around him and his circumstances. He loves fashion, and carries himself very highly. This interview was very lucky for me to be able to conduct. Kendo was about to leave again for another attempt to go to Milan, and his bus was leaving within the hour. He is a great guy, and I personally garnered much wisdom from my two weeks with him. Here is our interview:

This is Cole, interviewing Kendo the singer.

Yeah it's good to be a singer you know because without music life wouldn't be mystic, so there must be music with life. My favorite singer is R Kelly.

And where are you from?

I'm from Cameroon.

Can you tell me your story of why you left and how you got here?

There was this problem in my country, this problem where we share strikes, you know. So I never knew that it would be a big problem. So when we shared this

strikes, after the people gave us this strike they were like "lead us". They had this strike and after this they arrested people. So they started looking for people sharing the strikes and I was one of the people in my country.

What do you mean strikes?

Like these people, like today is a big day, nobody should work, nobody should go outside. So to respect the dead we hold these strikes on the street like this. Things like "we need peace". When they catch one of my friend, and my mother called me on the phone and told me to leave because they were looking for me. I have to leave at that same time because If the police catch you, they take you to the capital and ask what you were discussing with someone or what you were doing. They ask, "so you were at this strike in this city at this time?" They take you away and sentence you to life in prison. Your parents they don't see you anymore.

Really? Life in prison? So you were making political statements?

Yeah protesting. Things like respecting customs, we don't want war, we want peace because the French Cameroon and the English Cameroon we have problems within ourselves. Kind of like a small civil war. So it affects the country so much, and my city and other cities, my family and my friends. They shot one of my friends but luckily he did not die. If they catch you for anything related to protest it's a very big problem.

Why did they shoot him?

In the protest, they were shooting people with guns. So they shoot him, and other civilians. So there is a lot of political corruption. We don't even have school in the southern Cameroon. For more than two months we lost all internet connection, and we didn't have any information or know how things were going in the country. So it was a very big problem.

I understand. So how did you leave Cameroon?

So I leave when my mother calls me and told me they arrested one of my friends and told me I have to leave. She said I'll miss you and I'll never seen you again and you have to leave now and find a better place to go.

So you had to leave instantly?

Yes, the same day. I left right after the phone call. I go the village, and come up past my town by car and went out into the park. I take a small car out of Cameroon and into Nigeria. I paid a man to take me. I explained my situation to the man and he said, "Oh you really need to go now." So I reach Nigeria. Nigeria to Niger. Niger to Algeria. Algeria to Libya, and Libya to Italy.

So what was that journey like from Nigeria to Libya.

This journey was not easy because it is a desert, and the Arab people treat us very seriously, they do not like us.

How long was the journey from Nigeria to Libya?

The journey was something like two weeks to the coast of Libya. One of the borders we had to walk on foot for ten hours through the desert to cross it. I don't know the names of places because most of the time I was hidden in the back of a car, and we were always just passing through.

How many people were in the car?

We had 17 in a small car. We were all crammed into a land cruiser. We didn't eat, but we did find some people to give us water. I leave Cameroon on the 10th of February of 2017, and I reach Italy on the 20th of March, because the smuggler was so smart.

So from Libya to Italy how long did you wait at the coast for a boat?

I stayed in the ghetto for one week and they take us to the seaside. They say, "this is where you will depart" so we stayed there for another week and then left. They sent us on the 18th of March, we arrived to Lampedusa on the 20th. When we arrive to Lampedusa we stay at a temporary camp until they take us to Sicily.

From Lampedusa to Sicily did you travel by boat or how?

Yes we travelled by ship. From Libya to Lampedusa, we got in the boat and spent 7 hours on the sea until the international rescue from Italy. They brought us to Lampedusa, and the other boat with our group had 8 people die. We were lucky and didn't have any but it was still very difficult because they saw the boat, they saw the rescue and the happiness but they fall inside the water. Water is no good, it is often dangerous element. So they put us on their big boat and take us to Lampedusa. We arrive and the doctors; if you have any small problem the doctor will take care of you. We stayed in Lampedusa for 17 days and then stayed in Sicily for 11 days. Then we went to Calabria and the camp was already full but they still take down our names. So we stayed near until we had to leave, and take a train from Calabria to Milano. So I went to Milan before Rome. I don't know anything about it, so I went to Como to try to get to Switzerland. They asked for my passport and I said that I was just an immigrant. They turned me around, because they are not in the European Union. They brought me back to Como, and I was frustrated because nobody would let me go anywhere. I don't have a home, I had to leave my home and now I am looking for a home and a destiny. On the 10th of May I tried again and was sent back because my fingerprints are only for Italy. I tried to go to Venice, Verona, Padova, and nothing was working so I tried to go to France. I come back and go to Ventimiglia. The police catched me and took me to their headquarters to ask me for papers. I don't have any papers except my fingerprint so they tried to give me another paper, telling me I have 7 days to leave Italy. And then I found myself in Rome.

When did you arrive in Rome?

I arrived on the 20th of May, today is the 28th of July. I have been here for 2 months.

What are your thoughts on Rome and Italians?

The few people I know are good volunteers who help us to have food, clothes, shower, and shelter. Many people have documents but need to wait for appointment. I don't have documents so this is a big problem.

How was your time at Baobab?

My time at Baobab was good. From May to now, everything was good. They give me food, shower, shoes, clothes, they take me to many places like the beach. They are really good people. They treat us like humans, and they just bought me this ticket to Milan. They are great people and I am very appreciative. I give my thanks from God. Without God, people wouldn't be this nice. However, very soon it will be winter. Where are these people going to sleep?

What are your goals?

My goal is to go to Germany, go to school and upgrade my English, so I can learn more things and be able to teach people things and make my own impact on the world. I want to learn something and teach people what I learned.

What do you think the craziest thing to happen to you in Rome was?

The police. They used to come here when we were asleep and tear down the camp. They hit me, and that is what this scar is from. They came here three times while I was here, they take all the tents and everything inside and throw them away. They hit people and take people away to the headquarters of the police. Everyone runs when the police show up, they even throw away the documents that they give us. Very soon it will be winter. Where are these people going to sleep?

There is a police car right over there.

Yeah, they are getting out, we need to run now probably.

Kendo, the lover of music, is a political refugee. He participated in peaceful protests in his hometown, and many people were arrested. They were protesting to demand better livelihoods, according to Kendo. The police began to look for those protesters, and Kendo was one of these protesters. These protests, known as the 2016-2017 Cameroonian protests, were caused by the appointment of French-speaking judges in the two English-speaking areas of Cameroon, the Northwest and Southwest regions (Kwamboka, 2016).

Cameroon has ten autonomous regions; eight use French civil law while only two Anglophonic regions use common law. 27 total people were killed, with many injured and hundreds arrested. They wanted to protect the English culture, including the common law system of education from the French civil law system. Kendo's friend was one of these activists who was shot, yet survived. The government also put an internet blockade on those from the Northwest and Southwest regions of Cameroon, leading to increased protests and turmoil.

Kendo's mother made him leave Cameroon. She feared for his life, either literally or the idea of life in prison. She called him and told him to leave, so he left at that moment. He paid a man to take him to Nigeria, and eventually journeyed to Libya, just as Ibrahima, Ahmed, and Eddie did from their respective countries. Crossing the desert was difficult for him, crammed into a Land Cruiser without any food or water. He left shortly after the government's internet

blockade, in February of 2017. After some time in Libya, Kendo was set to leave for Italy. They spent seven hours on the sea before the international rescue from Italy. Their boat was lucky, but the other boat in their fleet had eight lives lost.

Eventually, Kendo made it to Rome, but not before failing to get to Switzerland. He also tried to get to France through Ventimiglia, and failed then too. Kendo did not know anyone other than the Baobab volunteers and fellow refugees, and enjoyed his time in Rome. He had goals to go to Germany and learn English, in order to help others and make a positive impact on the world. Particularly, Kendo did not enjoy the Italian police's treatment of migrants and refugees. They came three times in the two months he was there, tearing apart the camp, hitting people, and taking people to the police station. Ironically, our interview concluded with a few police cars pulling up to the camp, getting out of the car, and refugees, volunteers, and myself running to the woods behind the camp to hide. However, the police were just using an intimidation tactic, according to the volunteers, and pulled away within the next 15 minutes.

He had been in Rome for 2 months when we interviewed, and left that same day with a bus ticket those at Baobab had purchased for him. Those at Baobab gave Kendo contacts in Como, securing a place for him to sleep for a while before his next attempt to cross the border. I have been in contact with Kendo throughout the year, and though he was stuck in Como for many months, he has now achieved his dream and has been in Germany for five months. We often discuss different musicians, and He is in school learning both German and English, and lives in Ravensburg on the southern border.

All four of these human beings have fascinating stories, likely to have never been told. They are all at different phases in their refugee journey, yet all considered illegitimate refugees. I believe that their stories show that they are indeed humans who fled their homes for fear of their lives. Kendo, Ahmed, and Eddie all have vivid recollections of their war-torn and violent past. Ibrahima, though he claims he is an economic refugee, has many conditions that lead others to believe he also comes from a past like this. The refugee labelling system is broken, and these are just some of the examples of those whom the system has failed.

Rec 010 & Rec 011: Andrea Costa, Director of the Baobab Experience

I was also fortunate enough to get to interview the director of the Baobab Experience, Andrea Costa, and his words are incredibly powerful. Andrea is a larger Italian man with a look somewhat akin to a biker. He works as a stained glass artist full-time, with his own business. This is the history of Baobab, in interview form. The entire transcript is below, and his words are impactful enough for everyone to hear. Although his English is not perfect, his message resounds beautifully.

How did Baobab start?
Baobab started in Spring 2015, it started when the first boats of migrants from Libya started to arrive. It was exactly the middle of May 2015 and there were suddenly hundreds of migrants finding themselves lost in here in Rome, in Stazione di Tiburtina which is the second station in Rome because near Tiburtina it's a stop of the long-distances busses, and the long-distance busses are the busses that migrant's take. The Flixbus. Since the Flixbus are cheaper than the train, that's mostly what the migrant's use. Men, women of all ages started

bringing things to these migrants at this square outside the station, things to eat, dresses, water.

So they were just staying at the station?

Yes they were staying there but after three or four days the police understood the couldn't handle the situation so they came with special forces for an eviction. They sent everybody away and of course we are talking about migrants who didn't have a place to go and so they moved to a little street called Via Colpa on the other side of Tiburtina Station, where there was a refugee center, a small refugee center for 150-200 people. It was one of the refugee centers of Rome it was called Baobab. No it wasn't us. It was run by the authorities it was an official refugee center. So they went in and of course there were hundreds of them, and this refugee center was about to be dismissed. They were about to be dismissed by the authorities, they didn't want to pay their rent anymore but what happened is the citizens started helping migrants in this center.

So were you involved in this center at all? Volunteering at that center?

No not before. Everybody knew this center is was a famous and cultural center with an Eritrean restaurant so everybody in the neighborhood knew it. And it was used by the local population and suddenly like hundreds of people were there. in the summer of 2015 we had 800 people per day.

Wow. 800 per day like new people?

Yes and this is a question of the most important thing. We faced a new kind of migrant that was migrant in transit. They were mostly migrants from Eritrea and Ethiopia, some Sudani, that were going to the northern European countries. So they were just passing by Roma. All they needed was three days of rest and clothes and maybe to get some money from some relatives elsewhere in Europe and then keep on their journey. At that time the borders weren't closed. So they could move: France, Switzerland, Ventimiglia, and so that happened in Summer 2015. In October 2015 we hosted over 30,000 person. The authorities just closed their eyes and pretended not to see because they had, because for the Italian authorities it was better to close their eyes and make these people go away. They weren't finger printed, so they didn't have to seek asylum here. What happened after is that the European Union decided that was enough and started closing borders at the end of 2015. You have to respect the Dublin Treaty, you have to finger print people, and we closed the borders. And so that made it where the migrant in-transit became less in-transit. They got stuck here. Of course the Eritreans who have the right of protection, refugee status, that's the first thing we tried to fight. We don't understand why Eritrean's can have the refugee status and Sudani don't or Ethiopia don't. But that's the craziness of European politics. December 2015 we were evicted by the place, the building we were staying in. The authorities, the police and the mayor, said get out of here. And we started dialoguing with them. And we said we go away but we want to keep an informational hub outside of this place just to let migrant's know what are there rights, where they can go. In the winter of 2015 it was a pretty bad winter with the weather. There weren't many migrants coming. The water was bad, was cold. So we stayed outside of this place with a van and a gazebo in front of the building. I think there is a party for Miriam, can we keep on later?

Yeah.
There weren't many new arrivals but still a few people did come. We started working with the authorities so if migrants arrived we would call the authorities and say like "Hey there is three new arrivals" and they would place them in some refugee centers. But then suddenly in the first days of May 2016, they started arriving again, 10s 10s, 20, 30, 40, 50, women and men, and of course there weren't enough place in the refugee center so we started building tents near the center and then we got the whole street as a camp. I don't know if you've seen the New York Times (shows the situation in Via Colpa). Suddenly they decided to put some restricting laws on migration and especially on helping migrants. So, in Summer 2016, we started to have quite a high numbers of evictions. Police would come and take away the tents. But they couldn't stop the thing. At night the migrants would come back and we would put the tents back up. And this happened until the 30th of September of 2016. When the police came and they closed the street and they said "go away, you cannot stay here". And we started moving like gypsies, we moved us, the volunteers and the migrants, with our stuff with our hands. First we went near the cemetery, always in this area. we stayed there for four days near a church then they kicked us out from there and we went to a parking of the station on the other side and they kicked us away from there and then we moved to here. To the east entrance of the station. And we stayed here for several months. Every few weeks they would come and throw away things, take all the migrants and bring them to the police station for identification, and then they said "okay you cannot stay here anymore" so we left and came here. But even here we had three evictions. Everytime we build a camp that is comfortable for migrants, the police come. When they see that the migrants are too comfortable, they arrived and they tear camp down. What we say, ask the authorities is that we think they are right to find protection and it's their right to find a place to sleep, it's their right to find a place where they can meet people, a community. And this year we have worked a lot with schools for example, cause we really think that real integration, and the future of Europe comes from knowing who these people are. You know migrants for the European, for the big media, for the television, they are numbers. They are a percentage. They are statistics. It's like we forget they have names. They have first names, they have second names, they have stories, they have dreams, they have things they want to do. They have a pain inside for being forced to leave their country. And that is another thing people don't understand. Nobody is happy to leave his country. They are not on vacation. What MEDU, which is doctor for human rights, they tell us that 92% of this people you see here, they have signs of torture on their body. That means even the rest may not have signs on their body but they do, all of them, what happens in the camps in Sudan, what happened while crossing the desert, what happened in the camps of Libya, what happened crossing the Mediterranean Sea, what happened when they arrived here, you know it's something that I don't know how many of us could survive something like this. You see 15 year old kids in Italy that play with the Playstation and these people saw people dying. They saw their brother drowning with the ship-wreck, they saw

*their cousin die from torture in the Libya camp, they saw their friend die crossing the desert. (***Pause.)** *It's crazy.*

So how many people would you say are here right now?

150.

Two weeks ago?

70.

Wow. And most of the women and children, whats the process for them?

They arrive and we make it so the women, pregnant women, and young children make it to the refugee centers. This is the thing: we are not asking any more than the respect of human rights and the right of these people to get helped. To get helped and to understand the problem they have, to understand that they are young people who had terrible journies. I mean they need psychologists they don't need police. They don't need borders. We really feel and understand that Europe is going the wrong direction. If you think of terrorism, if you think of fundamentalism, if you think of integralism, we think that the more you welcome these people, the less easy it is for them to go in that direction. That is something that politics should understand. The more you welcome these people, the less ground you leave for fundamentalism, and potential terrorism. The thing is that all over Europe now is not only laws against migration but it's incredible how now the laws are made to prevent people helping migrants, which is terrible. Because we are all volunteers nobody gets money for this. We all share the station and stay here to help these people and we are considered bandits. It's crazy.

So what would you guess is the average amount of time a male spends here?

Well it has changed and it is changing. At the beginning it was three or four days, Summer 2015 it was maybe a week, 10 days. Now it is 15-20 days. To understand if it is better to go to the border with friends, to Switzerland or Austria, and that's why it's very important to network all these things and that's why we share information with the volunteers in Sicily where we land and the volunteers at the borders. So there is this new network that is not only Italian; it is a European network and it means that from the greek islands to spain, to London, the pro-migrant movement is growing. You always had anti-migrants, you know? We are doing what the institutions should do. We are doing the authorities job. We are doing nothing more than helping people who need help, and there may be some criminals among them, just like there are criminals among us you know? But really its people who need help and it's our duty to help them.

Have you ever had killing in the camp?

No. No we have only had a few fights, you know why? When they see you run a camp like this, you have to understand that these people have seen camps run by authorities for two years. So when they see people helping them, of course you have to watch out, that there is not it's too much alcohol because they do have

problems maybe in violence that they have inside that they have gathered in these two years of journey. You have to understand who you're talking with. You have to treat them as people who are just like you but have some problems. I have two daughters: If my daughter would run away from a country because there is war, dictatorship, or bombing, or hunger and they would have to do a long journey of being violated of being beaten and tortured, I would hope somebody would try to help them and talk to them and understand them. But of course they would not be the daughters I have now after such an experience.

What are your hopes for Baobab in the next year?

My hope is that the authorities could welcome all these people. House them. Help them with the relocation, help them with the legal things. Take the medical care. And we could do what we do best, doing activities with them. Showing them Roma, taking them to the beach, taking them to see a football match, taking them to play basketball or skating or skiing, or throwing. I mean we are talking of a generation of migrants who are in the years that people normally study. They should study and I would like the help them study. Show them what to do when they grow up. I'd like the help them in growing up just like we had the opportunity to.

Yesterday you were talking about your plans to appeal to the local authorities to try to make this a legitimized camp. Can you talk about that a little more?

Yes of course, we are saying that this is an abandoned place, we have a lot of big association who'd like to help us. Like donating to us big tents. It's a pity. Why not use this place to make it a good refugee center where you can do a lot of activities? The process is that we keep on searching for a dialogue with the authorities. If they say no to the dialogue than we go on and try to do it ourselves. We are doing something that is against the law. What we have to understand, is that in front of this there are tens of thousands dying this year, 2017, we are half a year in and there are already 10,000 who have died from shipwrecks, and more in the desert. So already 20,000-30,000 dead. I think not helping these people is unfair and unjust and I think that if the law won't permit you to help them, you have to disobey. Exactly like young white democrats did when you had in United States in the 60's when you had segregation. The law said you couldn't have blacks going in bars or in universities and you had white people helping them to go inside and breaking the law. The same that happened in South Africa more recently.

Baobab sprang into action as soon as the refugee crisis was tangible. Migrants were lost in Rome, and the Tiburtina Station was often where they found themselves. In Europe, the Flixbus transportation system is quite popular, due to its low cost and frequent transportation schedules. Many refugees used Flixbus to get from Sicily or Calabria to Rome, and the only Flixbus stop in Rome is in the Tiburtina train station. Those Italians who view migrants and refugees as human beings began to bring commodities to the station like food, water, and clothes. They started out by staying near the station, but were evicted by special forces after a few days.

They moved to a street nearby, and had a small refugee center located there. Originally, Baobab was an official refugee center. The government did not like how Baobab was handling the situation, and dissolved the organization.

The area was already popular for migrants, with established African-style cuisine present around the neighborhood. At one point, things picked up dramatically and Baobab was receiving up to 800 people per day. This was Italy's first experience with the idea of a migrant, or refugee, in transit. Many were passing by, only for a few days to rest up and continue on their journey. The majority of the refugees arriving were from Eritrea, Ethopia and Sudan. By October, Baobab had hosted over 30,000 different migrants. The Italian government did not intervene until other European countries started to close their borders at the end of 2015. Italy began fingerprinting and following the rules of the European Union during this time.

Even Baobab does not understand the labelling system, as they started advocating for non-Eritrean refugees. Andrea along with others did not understand why Eritreans were so easily granted refugee status, while those from other countries were not. Eventually, they were evicted again. However, this time they worked with the government to create a place for refugees to learn their rights and their options for the future. At this time, they solely provided informational support to migrants. It was winter, and migrants were not arriving as steadily as they had over the warmer months. By May of 2016, the influx of refugees began to pick up again. Over the summer, Baobab had multiple encounters with the police, who would come and remove the tents from the street. In September, the police officially kicked Baobab out of their place in Via Colpa. They became nomads, evicted at each new location they chose. Eventually, they established the home-base at the large abandoned parking lot near Tiburtina Station. Even though they have been fortunate enough to stay here, their camp is often still torn down by the Italian police force.

Andrea Costa believes in the humanity of these migrants. He aims to protect their basic human rights, maintaining that they have a right to find protection, a place to sleep, and a community. He knows that the future of the European continent is not a white Europe, but a diverse place where those from all cultures can come together and get along. He understands the human condition. He knows these people have their own stories, like Abraham, Eddie, Ahmed, or Kendo. He understands these refugees are not just on vacation, and that "nobody is happy to leave [their] country". They faced death. They survived through torture. However, they also have an undying fire of hope.

Costa maintains that these refugees do not need police interference. They do not need borders. They need *psychologists*. This may be one of the most important things in this research. Refugees have endured hardships and traumas that are unimaginable to those from first-world countries. Without respect and care, the refugee crisis can only get more severe. The more you take these people in and respect their humanity, the less likely they are to become radicalized.

Andrea Costa has an unwavering hope. Along with others, he has helped create and establish a network of Europeans ranging from Greece, to Spain, to London that want to help migrants. He believes they are doing the government's job. He acknowledges the idea that some of these refugees could be criminals, but also realizes that there are criminals from every society in the history of mankind. You cannot neglect the less fortunate out of fear. Costa believes that the government should do a better job working with migrants, and that Baobab would still continue its work even if the government began to accommodate refugees more efficiently. He

believes Baobab's greatest purpose is to do activities with refugees. Baobab aims to help refugees enjoy their time in Rome, from basketball tournaments to taking them to soccer games.

Past that, Baobab is currently working with authorities to create a legitimate organization. Though nothing has happened yet, they are unwavering in their hopes to make Baobab a comfortable place for refugees to stay. He knows how many have died trying to get to Italy, and maintains that if the law will not allow you to assist refugees that you should disobey. Human rights are more important than superficial laws, and compares Baobab's mission to that of Martin Luther King Jr. and other influential activists who had to go around the laws of the land.

Rec 009: Meeting with Baobab Refugees

I was also able to record a meeting between Andrea Costa and the refugees who had just recently arrived to the camp. It was translated into multiple languages from Italian: English, Arabic, Eritrean, French, and Swahili. The translators were all refugees, and were compensated for their time and skill. The meeting was held to inform refugees of their rights, how to get along in the camp, and how to avoid any trouble with the police.

Baobab is an informal camp. The volunteers you see here are just volunteers. It is not our job; it is not our work. We are here just because we think it is right to help you. This is important to know because it is important to know that we are all the same, and we are all fighting the same fight; the fight for your right to migrate, to go wherever you want. It is important because we have problems with the police & the authorities, just the way you have problems with the police and authorities. The better we cooperate altogether, the stronger we are, and the better we are against the police and those who don't want us to be here. The best way to be stronger is to first of all, don't have problems here. We all have to respect each other. Migrant's should respect volunteers, volunteers should respect migrants, migrants should respect migrants, and volunteers should respect volunteers. We don't want people causing problems here. Any problem, any question you can ask any of us, the volunteers or the mediators but please let's not solve by ourselves the problem. No fighting, no stealing, no getting drunk. This is what the police want. They want to show that here there are people that are no good. We are here because we know that you are all good people. Unfortunately, this is not a good time in Europe: in Italy, in France, in Germany, in Belgium. It's not a good time. It's not a good time for migrants and it's not a good time for people who want to help migrants. There are very restricting laws, the borders are closed, so we have to be very careful in how we behave and in the things we do. We try to give you a place to sleep and we promise that from tomorrow, we will bring new tents, new gazebo, and new mattresses for everybody. We try to give medical help four times a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday there is the camper the bus from doctor for human rights here from 7:00 in the evening until 10:00. And then on Monday mornings there is other doctors coming. We try to give legal aid, you see Giovanna, Mahmud, and it's important, especially for Sudani people who cannot enter the relocation program. Always ask the legal team what you can do, what is better for you. With Miriam and Roberto and other volunteers of Baobab we did a trip last weekend to the borders to see Ventimiglia and we went to see Como, the border with Switzerland. The situation is not so good. More or less, there are

400-450 Sudani brothers and also some Eritreans, men and women, living in the street like here but not in a condition like this. The police come every day, it's very difficult to cross the border. Some people make it, some people don't, some people tried 3,4,5 times to cross the border. French police is just like the Italian police. They are very strict, very severe, so it's not a good situation. Please before leaving, before taking your ticket to Ventimiglia or to Milano or to Como, talk with us or the legal team, we can tell you what is best, we can also give you some address, where to go and where to stay. Okay, now it's summer, it's very hot. Many of the volunteers here you see, are here for more than two years everyday. They are here to help you. We really need your help. The camp has to be clean. No fighting for food, there is food for everybody. And when people bring food, volunteers, donators, they don't want to see fighting. I know a lot of you don't have shoes. A lot of you need new clothes. Clothes is coming, and I hope also shoes. We want to help you but we don't produce shoes, we have no money. What we give you is donations of citizens; Roman citizens and associations from all over the world. So please help us. We don't care if you're Sudani, Eritrean, Palestinian, if you come from Gambia, from Senegal, from Cote d'Ivoire. We don't care if you come from Italy. We really think we are all the same. Any problem, please ask us, tell us.. There is no sense in fighting. Many of you are running away from places where they fight, where there is war, where there is dictatorship, where there is torture, you have done long journeys to come here. And we want to try to make it as best as possible for you. But we really need your cooperation. Okay, really, to be stronger we have to all be united and understand that we are all going the same direction. The authorities are fighting us but there is a lot of people from the South of Italy to the northern part of Europe who want to help. So really, we have to march together. And the better we are, the safer we are, the strongest we are. This is very important. So it is this reason that we are helping you. We want to help you, but we need your help. Thank you for listening and cooperating with us.

The Baobab volunteers' meeting with new refugee arrivals covered very basic principles. It highlighted Baobab's views of migrants, that all humans are the same and that this fight is a fight for humanity. Volunteers are in just as much danger as migrants from the authorities, and this needed to be made clear for refugees. Often, refugees are skeptical of those assisting them in Italy, as the reality of the migration business is well known. Baobab cannot afford to have refugees fighting or committing crimes, as this is the opposite of what Baobab's position on asylum-seekers is.

Andrea Costa then highlighted the reality of the European migrant situation, overviewing how governments and the EU as a whole are shifting toward strong anti-immigrant sentiments. He also summarized his trip to the border cities of Italy, and told refugees how dangerous the situation really is. Still, the police show up at the border camps every day, harassing refugees and utilizing tools like drones and hounds to keep migrants fearful and immobile.

The meeting emphasized how Baobab tries to help refugees. Costa promised more tents, mattresses, and that they are working on more access to clothes and shoes, along with their access to medical assistance from the Doctors for Human Rights. He told them of their access to legal aid, and of how they can hope to receive relocation or asylum documents. Costa advised

them to consult with volunteers if they are planning on trying to get to another country, as Baobab has connections and can provide places to sleep and people to help them in the other towns.

At the end of the meeting, Costa pleaded with refugees to remain peaceful. He told them that Baobab does not care where you are from, and that all humans are the same. There is no reason to fight, as most of these people are fleeing areas of war, dictatorship, and torture. He called for unity, and reminded refugees how people from every corner of Europe desire to help refugees. He closed the meeting by reminding everybody that this journey is one where every migrant and migrant supporter must work together to become stronger, and that victory will only come if everybody works together.

Conclusion

Whereas my time at Canopy focused on refugees at the end of their journey, being in Rome allowed me to explore refugee issues for those at the beginning of their journey. They typically go through Libya and sail to Italy, either to the island of Lampedusa or to Sicily. A majority of refugees view Italy as a transitory country before travelling on to their final destinations. According to both the Telegraph and the New York Times, common routes to the rest of Europe are through either Ventimiglia or Como. The former is the French-Italian border town (Squires, 2017), while the latter is considered the main Swiss-Italian border town (Horowitz, 2017). They go to these places hoping to get to more economically stable regions in Europe.

The old definition of refugee, simply defined as one compelled to leave their homeland has been traded for a more political definition that ostracizes a large part of the refugee community. Many countries and their severe issues are not recognized as legitimate reasons for a person to leave their homeland. The current definition must be changed in order to provide the silent 43.1 million with a voice and chances for a new life. It does not offer enough protection for all potential reasons of fleeing one's homeland. They do not want to be illegal. They want safety and shelter. They want the same rights that all other humans are given access to.

I would like to propose a new definition for what it means to be a refugee based on the sum of my research and experience. With this research project in mind, a refugee is a person who, regardless of their country of origin, owing to a well-founded fear for their lives, regardless of their reasoning, is outside the country of his nationality and is unwilling or unable to return to that country.

Though Europe is experiencing a wave of alt-right, anti-immigration leadership, they must revamp the Dublin principles. This unjustly burdens Italy and the other pourer southern countries with the refugee crisis. The European Union needs to change its policies to help refugees even more. Without doing so, the southern states will crumble. The three economic policy factors that need to be addressed are as follows: enable refugees to work during the asylum application phase, grant them geographical mobility, and provide them with the ability to have rapid labor market integration. Combined, these policy implementations will lead to lower costs for the government and increased tax revenues. Furthermore, the UNHCR needs to push first-world countries to resettle more refugees. Resettlement is down to half of what it was in 2016, and the world is letting down these displaced people groups.

For Italy specifically, the government must acknowledge how much empty space there currently is in the country. Many towns are turning into ghost towns, and the towns that have welcomed migrants and implemented successful integration tactics have begun to flourish. From Sutera to Mineo, many small towns have seen tremendous success through integrating refugees, and have created new subcultures throughout Italy. The government must implement a durable solution like this across the country, as there is a tremendous amount of vacant buildings and lands throughout.

Baobab, like other unofficial organizations, is picking up the slack of this crisis that the government should be solving. They may be breaking the law, but they are providing peace and acknowledging the humanity of these refugees. They must continue to advocate for human rights, and steadily accomplish the job of the government until the European Union and its member countries get a solid grip on how to handle the crisis.

The words of Emma Lazarus written on the United States' most iconic landmark hail from a long line of Jewish ancestry, as her family was among some of the first European emigrants to America. The world has forgotten these famous words, the words that made America so successful. Refugees are incredible, deep, funny, brave, smart, and much more. It baffles me how the world has turned its back on this incredibly under-cared for group of people. I hope that with my research, and the stories shared throughout it, that these people can have a voice that they have never had before.

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